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# **The Career of a Country Lawyer**

**ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

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## THE CAREER OF A COUNTRY LAWYER— ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

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It is forty-five years since a simple-minded country lawyer from the prairies of Illinois, standing before the Capitol, pledged himself, for a second time, to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States." He had walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and the people to whom he spoke had walked with him. A sudden sunshine fell upon his care-worn face as he closed his appeal: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations." Four years earlier, standing before a multitude who neither understood nor trusted him, he had said to his "dissatisfied fellow-countrymen": "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Ever since, men have asked the question, Who taught him? Where did he gain the power to say so simply the words that have staid in the memories and hearts of men through all these years?

There was nothing extraordinary about it. This simple-minded country lawyer had sprung from good Southern stock. The

Lincolns had been pioneers in New England, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky, and they included in their connection men of mark and men of character. Abraham Lincoln had the training of a devoted mother, the encouragement of loyal friends, and the inspiration of a brilliant rival who was likewise his friend. Poverty and want had beset his way at every turn and spurred him to success. How this discipline made a lawyer of him, and how his training at the law made him what he was, it is the purpose of this paper to show.

His Indiana boyhood gave him the same opportunities that came to other Hoosier boys. When, in his eagerness to know what the outside world was doing, he ran to the roadside to hail the passing emigrant and ask questions, his father thought him lazy and drove him back to his work; and when, late at night, he lingered by the fireplace to ask other questions of the wayfarer who had come out of the busy East, his father failed to understand and banished him, reluctant, to his bed, where he left the world of conscious learning for the world of dreams in which he chiefly lived.

"I remember," this boy has said, "how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I do not think I ever got angry at anything else in my life; but that always disturbed my temper. I can remember going to my little bed room, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down trying to make out what was the exact meaning of their, to me, dark sayings. I could not sleep, although I tried to, when I got on such a hunt for an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over; until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. This was a kind of passion with me, and it has stuck by me; for I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north, and bounded it south, and bounded it east, and bounded it west."

At four years old, at ten, at fourteen, and at seventeen, each time for perhaps a month, the boy whose ambition was to learn to express a thought so plainly "that any boy he knew could comprehend" was permitted to go to school. His teachers were not

educational specialists,<sup>1</sup> but they were men of affairs who stimulated public spirit and ambition in the boy. The influence of these men of affairs, as well as of the groups of the illiterate, who, at the country store of Gentryville, admiringly drew the boy out, is not to be ignored by one who would trace Lincoln's talents to their sources.

It is said that the boy Lincoln used to walk fifteen miles to Boonville to attend court. On one of these occasions he was so impressed with the brilliant conduct of his case by a Kentucky lawyer named Breckenridge that he introduced himself. But the ungainly youth made no progress in the acquaintance. Forty years later at the White House President Lincoln reminded Mr. Breckenridge of the trial which had left such a deep impression on his mind. It was in these country courts in Indiana and Illinois that there gathered from miles around men into whose colorless lives the incidents of a trial at law brought much that was of absorbing interest. "The court rooms were always crowded," writes Mr. Arnold,<sup>2</sup> Lincoln's colleague and biographer. "To go to court and listen to the witnesses and lawyers was among the chief amusements of the frontier settlements. At court were rehearsed and enacted the drama, the tragedy, and comedy of real life. The court room answered for the theater, concert hall, and opera of the older settlements. The judges and lawyers were the stars; and wit and humor, pathos and eloquence, always had appreciative audiences."

In 1830 came the migration to Illinois. The boy, now twenty-one, took the lead on the hard journey, driving the oxen, and peddling from house to house the little stock of notions he had

<sup>1</sup> They were Zachariah Riney, who is buried within the Trappist monastery of Gethsemane in Kentucky, and Crawford, a lifelong resident of Spencer County, Indiana, and a justice of the peace, and Dorsey, coroner and county treasurer, library and bridge trustee, who led in every movement for the public good, and the boy's friend, John Pitcher, legislator and judge, who lent him the Indiana statutes and planted in his breast that interest in the law for which he came to hunger and thirst as for righteousness itself.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac N. Arnold, "Recollections of the early Chicago and Illinois Bar," in Fergus Historical Series.

laid in for this matchless commercial opportunity. He was spokesman as well as leader, and plied every wayfarer with questions about the doings of men in the political and social life of the sociable West.

In Indiana Abraham Lincoln had been his father's serf. In the Land of Full Grown Men—for that was the meaning of the Indian name Illinois—he was now emancipated by law. For a few years more he was still to do the bidding of other men as laborer and clerk. As his thirst for knowledge, his social instinct, and his ambition brought him more and more into the fellowship of men, he was not slow to abandon the "hired man's" job and begin to climb.

The story of the Black Hawk War of 1832, young Lincoln winning his captaincy by his physical prowess, as Saul and David won their kingdom, is the story of Lincoln's awakening to the possibilities of a political career. On this summer-time frolic he won renown as an athlete and teller of stories. He was not averse to earning a dollar in a foot race or a wrestling match, but what was more to the point, he gained among those three thousand pioneer soldiers the good will of many who in later years were to be his supporters in politics, his clients, and his colleagues at the law. Here, too, he won the friendship of his major, John T. Stuart, who, two years later, served with him in the Illinois legislature. Major Stuart was already a successful practitioner. In a private talk during the canvass Stuart encouraged Lincoln to study law, and after the election lent him books. These the young man carried with him as he walked back and forth between Springfield and New Salem. Both before the session and later, when, the burdens of state being laid aside, the princely income of three dollars a day became no longer available, he plunged into his studies. He was admitted to the Bar and removed to Springfield in 1837. The advertisement in the Sangamo Journal, dated April 12, 1837, proclaims that

"J. T. Stuart and A. Lincoln, attorneys and counsellors-at-law, will practice conjointly in the courts of this judicial circuit. Office No. 4 Hoffman's Row, up stairs."

The first circuit extended from Alton to the Wisconsin line,

and despite the paucity of population and the difficulties of transportation offered a tempting field for professional activity. These very obstacles made opportunities for him. He thrived on hardships and exposure, and made his iron constitution and his gigantic physical strength serve his clients' necessities as no other lawyer of that day could.

When he removed to Springfield Lincoln had served two terms in the legislature; he had been postmaster under a Democratic President and had carried the mail in his hat (thus doubtless being the pioneer in rural free delivery). The meager income from this source was increased substantially by a three dollar per diem earned by him as deputy under a Democratic county surveyor, John Calhoun, who afterwards made a name for himself in Kansas revolutionary politics. The surveys of the towns of Petersburg and Albany are among those on file in the records of Menard and Logan counties, with the certificate of A. Lincoln as deputy under John Calhoun and another county surveyor, T. M. Neale. These two positions made it possible for him to continue his studies and to undertake a mercantile venture whose early collapse burdened him for years with what, in recognition of its appalling size, he was wont to call "the national debt."

A customer at this store of Berry and Lincoln at New Salem would have sought in vain for Berry, the drunkard. Lincoln he would have found lying on his back in the grass with his feet propped high against the shady side of a tree-trunk, his lank body slowly squirming about to keep out of the sun, and his mind so absorbed in Blackstone that he seemed wholly indifferent to business. It was while he was managing partner of Berry and Lincoln's department store that he started his law library. As he tells it:

"A man who was migrating to the west drove up with a wagon which contained his household plunder. He asked if I would buy an old barrel, . . . which he said contained nothing of special value. I paid a half dollar for it, put it away, and forgot all about it. Some time after, I came upon the barrel and emptying it, I found at the bottom a complete edition of Blackstone's Commentaries. I began to read those famous works and I had plenty of time, for during the long summer days

when the farmers were busy with their crops, my customers were few and far between. The more I read, the more intensely interested I became. Never in my life was my mind so absorbed. I read until I devoured them."

From this unpromising beginning to the far-off day in 1864, when he received from Princeton University the degree of Doctor of Laws, the evolution of the lawyer is the story of slow and patient growth in that fine sense for the feelings of others which marks the gentleman, a spiritual growth indeed, and a growth in wisdom and in power.

Two letters, written years later, throw some light on his method of preparing himself for the law. To a young friend<sup>8</sup> he wrote in 1855:

"If you are resolutely determined to make a lawyer of yourself the thing is more than half done already. It is a small matter whether you read *with* anybody or not. I did not read with any one. Get the books and read and study them till you understand them in their every feature, and that is the main thing. It is of no consequence to be in a large town while you are reading. I read at New Salem, which never had three hundred people in it. The *books* and your *capacity* for understanding them are just the same in all places. . . . Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing."

To another he wrote in 1860:<sup>4</sup>

"Yours asking the 'best method of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the law' is received. The mode is very simple, though laborious and tedious. It is only to get the books and read and study them carefully. Begin with Blackstone's Commentaries and after reading it carefully through, say twice, take up Chitty's Pleadings, Greenleaf's Evidence, and Story's Equity, etc., in succession. Work, work, work, is the main thing."

Earlier in his career than the Blackstone incident is the acquisition by some process now forgotten of the Indiana Revised Statutes of 1824. This was Lincoln's first law book and is now in the Vanuxem-Potter collection in Philadelphia. Its value to the young lawyer must have been political rather than professional. It contained the Declaration of Independence, the Ordinance

<sup>8</sup> To Isham Reavis.

<sup>4</sup> To J. M. Brockman.


State of Illinois, }  
Menton County } ss.

Of the November term of the  
Menton Circuit Court, in  
the year A.D. 1845.

Nancy Green plaintiff complains  
of Menton Graham, defendant, in custody H.  
of a plea of assumpsit. For that whereas  
the said defendant herebefore, to-wit, on  
the 28<sup>th</sup> day of October, in the year  
A.D. 1844, at the county aforesaid, together  
with John Owens and Andrew Beardsmore,  
his promissory note in writing, bearing date  
the day and year aforesaid and  
thereby then and then promised to pay,  
twelve months after the date thereof,  
to the said plaintiff, the sum of one  
thousand dollars, with interest thereon  
at the rate of twelve per cent  
per annum, for value received  
and then and then delivered said  
note to said plaintiff.

Yet said defendant (although  
often requested) has not, nor  
has either the said Owens, or the said  
Beardsmore, paid the said sum of money  
in said note specified a day, for  
thereof to said plaintiff, but he  
to do has wholly neglected and  
refused, and still does neglect  
and refuse to the payment of the  
plaintiff of two thousand dollars,  
and therefore she brings her  
suit H.

Lincoln & Co. and son p. j.



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nance of 1787, creating the Northwest Territory, the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of Indiana. In the Ordinance of 1787 and in the Indiana Constitution he first found formal, authoritative expression of the people's disapproval of slavery. The constitutional provision was as follows:

"As the holding of any part of the human creation in slavery . . . can only originate in usurpation and tyranny, no alteration of this constitution shall ever take place so as to introduce slavery . . . in this state."

This book doubtless came into his hands in Indiana, whither his father had migrated from Kentucky to escape the competition of slave labor, and there is little doubt that its provisions against slavery, as well as those for reclaiming fugitive slaves, influenced his attitude toward a question to whose solution he gave so large a part of his later life.

At New Salem Lincoln boarded with a justice of the peace who bore the odd name of Bowling Green, and studied Kirkham's Grammar under Mentor Graham, the impecunious village schoolmaster, and read and committed to memory the poems of Burns and the plays of Shakespeare which he borrowed from Graham. New Salem is no longer even a deserted village. The store where Lincoln kept post-office and created "the national debt" is demolished and, board by board, is being made over into souvenirs. The village is scarcely even a memory to the octogenarians of Menard County. A thriving Chautauqua desecrates the spot where Lincoln read Blackstone and paid a part of his board by rocking the baby and doing chores for Nancy and Bowling Green.

In the files of the Circuit Court at Petersburg, a mile from New Salem, is still to be seen a declaration in Lincoln's handwriting, in the case of Nancy Green *vs.* Mentor Graham and his two sureties, which shows how the young lawyer had to shut his eyes to the claims of Mentor Graham upon his friendship in order to serve Nancy Green's necessities. A facsimile, or "sick family," as Lincoln called it, accompanies this paper.

Before justices of the peace, in the circuit courts of forty-five different counties in Illinois, and occasionally in Indiana, in the federal courts of Illinois, Ohio, and probably Missouri, and in the

state and federal supreme courts, the practice that Abraham Lincoln built up in twenty years was remarkable. In the reports and in the circuit court dockets is to be found every conceivable variety of cases.<sup>5</sup>

It would be a mistake to imagine that there were not plenty of lawyers to conduct the litigation, or that there was any monopolizing of the practice by a few men. Thus, in Eighth Illinois, containing cases decided in 1845 and 1846, Lincoln had seventeen cases, but eighty-three other lawyers in the same volume had from one to sixteen cases each. When Tenth Illinois was published in 1849 a thousand lawyers were enrolled in the Supreme Court of the State. "The days of man's innocency" had already passed.

The office docket, containing a partial account of the transactions of the three firms of Stuart and Lincoln, Logan and Lincoln, and Lincoln and Herndon, between 1838 and 1860, is still to be seen at Springfield. It contains some four hundred entries of service rendered, omitting many cases in which we know Lincoln to have been employed. The extent of these employments it is impossible now to learn, for the federal court records of Judges Pope and Treat and Justice McLean were destroyed in the Chicago fire, and the court dockets in many counties fail to indicate the names of counsel, while, in all, the records are incomplete.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the subjects may be of interest: Jurisdiction of justice of the peace, the validity of a slave as the consideration for a promissory note, enforcement of gambling debts, seduction, fraud, sale of real estate of decedent, guardianship, mortgage and mechanic's lien foreclosure, divorce, specific performance, suretyship, county seat wars, ejectment, wills, the defense and sometimes the prosecution of crimes, damages for personal injuries, for prairie fires, rescission, slander, fees and salaries, mandate, quo warranto, injunction, replevin, patents, taxation, insurance, carriers, partition, liquor questions, political questions, statute of frauds, railway stock subscriptions, eminent domain, trusts and trustees, questions of constitutional law, and procedure at law and in chancery. In the circuit courts, where Lincoln was often employed at the time the case was called for trial no case seemed too small to command his service. The trials in that day indicated a litigious disposition in the community which has happily disappeared with the advance of civilization.

Mr. Frederick Trevor Hill, in his admirable work, "Lincoln the Lawyer," publishes a list of 172 cases in the Illinois Supreme Court, in which Lincoln's name appears as attorney of record.<sup>6</sup> To this list should be added:

Cunningham *vs.* Fithian, 6 Ill. 269.

(His name was omitted by the official reporter. See 7 Ill., 650.)

State of Illinois *vs.* Illinois Central, etc., Co., 27 Ill. 64.

In addition to the foregoing, the Illinois Central Railroad Company, in a recent brochure, privately published, mentions Walker *vs.* Herrick, 18 Ill. 570, a suit involving the validity of certain land grants which was brought upon Lincoln's advice and won upon the theory advanced by him in his written opinion given to the railroad company in 1856.

The reports of the Supreme Court of the United States contain several Illinois cases in which the names of counsel are not given. Three of Lincoln's cases are there reported, however.

United States *vs.* Chicago,<sup>7</sup> 7 How. (U. S.) 185.

Lincoln for appellee.

Lewis, for the use of Nicholas Longworth *vs.* Lewis, 7 How. (U. S.) 775.

Lincoln for appellee.

Forsyth *vs.* Reynolds, 15 How. (U. S.) 358.

Lincoln for defendant.

In the reports of the federal courts, incomplete as they were, thirteen of his cases appear.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> That Lincoln appeared in this case, although his name is omitted from the official report, is stated on the authority of the Clerk of the Supreme Court of the United States.

<sup>8</sup> These are:

Lincoln *vs.* Tower, 2 McLean 473.

Lincoln for plaintiff.

January *vs.* Duncan, 3 McLean 19.

Logan & Lincoln for plaintiff.

Sturtevant *vs.* City of Alton, 3 McLean 393.

Logan & Lincoln for defendant.

Lewis *vs.* Administrators of Broadwell, 3 McLean 568.

Logan & Lincoln for defendant.

From these reported cases it would seem that Lincoln was open to the charge of being a corporation lawyer, which in these days of militant democracy is often an obstacle to political advancement. At a time when corporations carried on but a small part of the business or the litigation his regular clientage included all classes of municipal corporations, besides mercantile and manufacturing companies, banks, insurance companies, and railroads—the last-named including the Illinois Central, the Atlantic, the Alton and Sangamon, and the Tonica and Petersburg roads.

His request for a renewal of his pass as attorney for the Alton is in his characteristic humor:

“Feb. 13, 1856.

“R. P. MORGAN, ESQ.

“*Dear Sir.*—Says Tom to John: ‘Here’s your old rotten wheelbarrow. I’ve broke it, usin’ on it. I wish you would mend it, case I shall want to borrow it this arter-noon.’”

“Acting on this as a precedent, I say, ‘Here’s your old “chalked hat,”’<sup>o</sup> I wish you would take it and send me a new one; case I shall want to use it the first of March.

“Yours truly,  
A. LINCOLN.”

Of the one hundred and seventy-five cases in the Illinois reports he won ninety-two and lost eighty-three; of the ten cases

*Voce vs. Lawrence*, 4 McLean 203.

Lincoln for plaintiff.

*Lafayette Bank vs. State Bank of Illinois*, 4 McLean 208.

Lincoln for plaintiff.

*Moore vs. Brown*, 4 McLean 211.

Lincoln for defendant.

*Kemper vs. Adams*, 5 McLean 507.

Logan for plaintiff, Lincoln for defendant.

*United States vs. Prentice*, 6 McLean 65.

Logan & Lincoln for defendant.

*Columbus Insurance Co. vs. Peoria Bridge Ass’n*, 6 McLean 70.

Lincoln for plaintiff, Logan for defendant.

*United States vs. Railroad & Bridge Co.*, 6 McLean 516.

Lincoln for defendant.

*McCormick vs. Manny*, 6 McLean 539.

Lincoln for defendant.

<sup>o</sup> The vernacular for pass.

in McLean's reports (U. S. Cir. Ct.), whose final decision is given, he won seven; and of the three cases in the U. S. Supreme Court he won two.

In the legislature of 1834 Lincoln served with John T. Stuart, Stephen T. Logan, and Stephen A. Douglas. The legislature of 1836 brought together a remarkable group of great men: Lincoln and Douglas; Stuart and Logan; Edward D. Baker, afterwards Senator from Oregon; Orville H. Browning, afterwards Senator and Secretary of the Interior; James A. Shields, afterwards general in the Civil War and Senator; John A. McClermand, afterwards congressman and general in the Civil War; Dan Stone, afterwards circuit judge, but remembered only for the protest against slavery which he and Lincoln registered on the legislative journals; William A. Richardson, later U. S. Senator; John A. Logan, and John J. Hardin—all of them brilliant men and soon to become leaders of the Bar of the young state.

The chief value of this legislative experience to the young lawyer was in the opportunity it gave him to enlarge his acquaintance among his own profession. The laws passed from 1835 to 1839 do not read as if Solon had drafted them. Beside the internal improvement acts, about the only creative legislation then enacted, is a series of statutes declaring Spoon River, Crooked River, the Snicarty, Skillet Fork, and others of their kind, to be navigable streams. And these enactments suggest Lincoln's familiar conundrum: "Calling a dog's tail a leg, how many legs has he?"

Lincoln had come to Springfield penniless but by no means friendless. As one of the "Long Nine" from Sangamon County he had been the chief factor in their successful effort to remove the capital from Vandalia to Springfield, a service for which the people of Springfield did not lack appreciation. The invitation to a partnership with Major John T. Stuart was a compliment, and the new association gave him a position at the Bar and in the community which would not otherwise have been his so soon. Although Stuart's long absences while campaigning and at Congress impaired the business of the firm, they threw responsibilities upon young Lincoln and gave him confidence in himself.

Lincoln was enrolled by the Supreme Court as a member of the Bar on March 1, 1837. His admission to the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States was at the November term, 1848. He was never without a partner.

The partnership with Major Stuart commenced on April 12, 1837, and continued until April 14, 1841.

Stuart was two years older than Lincoln, a man of commanding presence, of dignified and courtly manners, quick to make friends and able to hold them loyally to himself. He was a graduate of a Kentucky college and an old-fashioned, polished gentleman, a successful lawyer, and always a politician. This intimate association of four years, with a common interest in the law and in politics, was worth much to the junior partner.<sup>10</sup>

The firm of Logan and Lincoln lasted from April 14, 1841, until Sept. 20, 1843. Judge Logan had been circuit judge from

<sup>10</sup> The Stuart and Lincoln docket gives some idea of the character of the early practice and of the fees charged.

An entry dated July 14, 1838, reads:

"Lincoln rec'd of Z. Peter \$2.81¼ cents which is taken in full of all ballances due up to this date."

It does not appear just what is meant by Lincoln's facetious entry in this record:

"Commencement of Lincoln's administration, 1839, Nov. 2."

Other items are interesting.

Thus: "Lincoln paid for stove pipe.....	\$8.50
"      "      " wood .....	.50
"      "      " saw .....	2.25

Or this: Johnson *vs.* Gay. Forcible detainer. Before Justice Clement, Nov. 7th. Paid Lincoln by board \$6.00."

The financing of a law office was simpler then than now, and credit was sometimes extended. Thus:

"Sam'l M. Ralston & Jas. Douglass.

Writing-bond and notes.....	\$1.00
Ralston paid Lincoln.....	\$.50
Paid L. ....	.50

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Porter *vs.* Torrey

Bad chance for fee.....	\$20.00
Paid and divided.....	\$5.
Paid and divided.....	10.
Due .....	10.

1835 to 1837, and had resigned his place at a salary of \$750 a year to take up what for some years was probably the largest general practice at the Illinois Bar. He was nine years older than Lincoln. Elihu B. Washburne described Logan as "A small, thin man, with a little, wrinkled, weazened face, set off by an immense head of hair which might be called 'frowzy.' He was dressed in linsey-woolsey and wore very heavy shoes. His shirt was of unbleached cotton and unstarched, and he never incumbered himself with a cravat. His voice was shrill, sharp, and unpleasant, and he had not a single grace of oratory—but yet, when he spoke, he always had interested and attentive listeners. Underneath this curious and grotesque exterior there was a gigantic intellect."

Just why this partnership was so brief has not been told. Perhaps Lincoln did not accommodate himself enough to Judge Logan's ideas and was too easy-going and unmethodical, and too independent of any sort of restraint; perhaps the ambition of both men to go to Congress made it hard for them to work in harmony. At all events, the firm prospered and Logan was its controlling spirit. Lincoln was an unsuccessful candidate for the congressional nomination during this period, although later he was elected for one term. Logan became his successor on the Whig ticket, but was defeated. The only pleadings of the firm to be found in the files of Sangamon County are in Judge Logan's handwriting. Unless Lincoln's autographs of this period have been stolen, this would indicate that Logan kept the reins of authority in his own hands. Practically all of the pleadings of Stuart and Lincoln and of Lincoln and Herndon—many of which

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The mathematics of the above account is not sound, but as the debt was not paid, it makes no difference.

The fees charged were certainly modest.

"Services rendered Moses M. Morton, Adm'r

Petition for sale of real estate

Paid and divided.....	\$1.50
" Lincoln .....	5.00
do. ....	1.00

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Total ..... \$7.50

I have seen—are in Lincoln's hand, and as clear as if written yesterday. They cover so many sheets in the old Sangamon files, and in some other counties where the thief has not yet been, that one wonders how Lincoln had time for anything else. All are written with laborious care. The apt word is used; there are singularly few corrections, and the sand then used as a blotter still clings to the sheets. The spelling is reasonably correct—vastly more so, at any rate, than that of George Washington, in his autograph manuscripts.

It is easy to see, without reflecting on either partner, how these two positive characters, so unlike in many vital respects, found it hard to work together. And it is pleasant to remember that in later years, when Lincoln's giant struggle with Douglas had made him a world figure, Logan was his devoted friend, contributing of his fortune, as well as of his store of wisdom and influence, to the advancement of his former partner, and, on that bitter day in April, 1865, offering the final tribute of the Bar to the memory of the man they loved.

Lincoln's choice of Herndon for a partner seems a strange one after his close association with a man of Logan's character and ability, and particularly in view of Herndon's subsequent treatment of Lincoln's reputation. Herndon's father was Archie G. Herndon, one of "the Long Nine," and a politician of prominence at Springfield. And "Billy" Herndon, as he was called, was the cousin of "Row" Herndon of the Clary Grove "gang" at New Salem, to whose support Lincoln owed his captaincy and his first legislative successes. The young lawyer had graduated at Jacksonville and had clerked in Joshua F. Speed's store where he was known as a scholarly youth with some native ability and plenty of assurance. The recommendation of Speed, Lincoln's only intimate friend, and a sense of loyalty toward the friends of his earlier days had their influence. No doubt, too, being self-taught and timid about his own attainments, Lincoln attached undue importance to the young man's college training. Herndon helped in the trial of their cases—much as a law clerk would—and drove to Petersburg and nearby county seats in the circuit, sometimes with Lincoln and sometimes alone. But, although

sharing equally in the earnings of the firm, he was not looked upon as an equal participant in its responsibilities, and—so we are told by a client of the firm—was not consulted about important matters when Lincoln was absent. But for the Herndon biography, the association would, doubtless, be forgotten.

In Springfield, the Supreme Court in the forties sat twice a year where the law required it to “continue until the business before it shall be disposed of.” The library was in the court room. Here the lawyers from all over the state gathered to look up their authorities, prepare their arguments, and, in the evenings, to hold reunions. At these gatherings Lincoln was the center of an interested group. His stories amused them, and his talk, especially when stimulated by the congenial companionship and esprit du corps of the Bar of that day, always commanded attention.

Lincoln’s first case in the Illinois reports, decided in 1840, was *Scammon vs. Cline*, 3 Ill. 456. It had been tried before Judge Dan Stone in Boone County and won below by Lincoln’s client, but was reversed by the Supreme Court. It was a J. P. appeal, and in the Circuit Court it was dismissed on technical grounds set up by Lincoln. One of the Supreme judges who reversed the case was Stephen A. Douglas, then only twenty-seven years old, and the Judge Stone who decided it below, was the man who had joined with Lincoln in protest in the legislature of 1837 against the extension of slavery.

His last case in that court was *State vs. Illinois Central R. R. Co.*, 27 Ill. 63, involving the principle that railway property must be taxed at its present, and not at its prospective, value, and that the inquiry should be, what it is worth for the purposes for which it was designed and not for any other purposes to which it might be applied.

Between these two cases are several in which new and important principles were established by Abraham Lincoln.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Among these are:

*Bryan vs. Wash*, 7 Ill. 557, which has been cited and followed eighty-five times.

*Griggs vs. Gear*, 8 Ill. 2, cited 51 times.

It is said that Lincoln was not learned in the law. True it is that in those days the publication of decisions was no such splendid riot of wood-pulp and electrotype as it is today. But the text-books of Greenleaf and Story and Parsons were both law and literature, and the libraries accessible to attorneys were not made up then of machine-made books compiled and edited vicariously as they are today.

With the library of the Supreme Court just across the street, there was no need for many books in the dismal room where Lincoln and Herndon held forth. Though absent from his Springfield office much of the time, Lincoln had access to all the books that are the recognized classics of English and American law. These he must have known familiarly, for he cited them continually in his briefs. The little library he left in 1861 has not become widely scattered.<sup>12</sup> Major William H. Lambert, of Philadelphia, has two of its volumes; there are twenty-one in the Vanuxem-Potter collection in Philadelphia, and ten in the Oren-

Perry *vs.* McHenry, 13 Ill. 227, cited 47 times.

Ross *vs.* Irving, 14 Ill. 171, cited 33 times.

Illinois Central R. R. Co. *vs.* Morrison, 19 Ill. 136, cited 24 times.

<sup>12</sup> The list follows:

In the Lambert collection:

Illinois Conveyancer.

Angell on Limitations.

In the Vanuxem-Potter collection:

A volume containing the Declaration of Independence, constitution of the United States, the first constitution of the State of Indiana, and various acts passed by its state legislature, during the session of 1823-1824.

Chitty's Pleadings and Parties, 1844.

Stephen's Commentaries on the Laws of England, 4 vols., 1841.

Greenleaf on Evidence, Vol. 1, 1848.

Revised Statutes of Illinois, 1844.

Kent's Commentaries, 4 vols., 1851.

Smith's Landlord and Tenant, 1856.

Story's Equity Jurisprudence, 2 vols., 1843.

Parsons' Law of Contracts, 2 vols., 1851.

Wharton's Criminal Law, 1857.

Redfield's Law of Railways, 1858.

Stephen's Pleading, Philadelphia, 1857.

dorf collection at Springfield. So far as known there were no others except the Illinois reports which are now owned at Springfield.

The Springfield law office has been described many times. In the reminiscences of the late J. B. Bennett, of Cincinnati, published in *Rough Notes*, volume 41, at page 78, appears this description of the man in his office:

"At the top of the stairway you directly entered a long room, destitute of every honest claim to be titled an office. It was a low, black, schooner sort of an affair—dusty, dingy and destitute of ornament, unless the lawyer's old rusty stove, like the one-horse shay, ready to collapse, might be so construed. . . . The front part of the room, while absolutely barren, was nevertheless impressively full of emptiness. At the back part was a large pine table. . . . On this table were a few law books, scattered in appropriate disorder. Towards the end of the table, uncommonly tall, stood a giant man intently reading a law book, impressing the spectator with the idea that the man was either too tall for the room or that the ceiling was too low for the man. The book he was reading was slightly inclined so as to catch the faint rays of light on the pages from a rear window. The shade and background of the whole, with the somber hue of the reader, made a very dark picture, and the man stood like a silhouette excepting a momentary flash of the eye which he gave to the intruder, and then continued his reading. That glance of the eye was the only recognition or sign of life. . . ."

Mr. Arnold<sup>13</sup> describes the man thus:

"Lincoln was six feet, four inches in height and would be instantly recognized as belonging to that type of tall, large-

In the Orendorf collection:

Barbour & Herrington, *Eq. Dig.*, vol. 3 (1857).

Biddle & McMurtrie, *Index to Eng. Com. Law*, vols. 1 and 2 (1857).

A. S. Taylor on Poisons in Relation to Medical Jurisprudence, 1848.

Barbour's *Equity Digest of U. S., England, and Ireland*, 1843.

3 Curtis' *U. S. Dig.*, 1846.

Chitty & Temple, *Law of Carriers*, 1857.

Angell & Ames on Corporations, 1846.

1 *U. S. Digest for 1847*.

<sup>13</sup> Isaac N. Arnold, "Reminiscences of the Illinois Bar, Forty Years Ago," in Fergus' *Historical Series*.

boned men, produced in the northern part of the Mississippi Valley, and exhibiting its peculiar characteristics in the most marked degree in Tennessee, Kentucky and Illinois. In any court room in the United States he would have been instantly picked out as a western man. His stature, figure, dress, manner, voice, and accent, indicated that he was of the northwest. In manner he was always cordial and frank, and although not without dignity, he made every person feel quite at his ease. I think the first impression a stranger would get of him, whether in conversation or by hearing him speak, was, that this is a kind, frank, sincere, genuine man; of transparent truthfulness and integrity: and before Lincoln had uttered many words, he would be impressed with his clear, good sense, his remarkably simple, homely but expressive Saxon language, and next, by his wonderful wit and humor."

Mr. S. Wesley Martin, now living in California, in a recent address, has described Lincoln's manner and looks:

"He was a convincing speaker. He used no gestures, except that occasionally he would extend his long right arm and point with his index finger at the people in a way that seemed to say, 'Don't you see?'

"I shall never forget how Lincoln was dressed. His coat was of black, glossy alpaca. It seemed to be several inches too short for him, and he buttoned the lowest button so that the upper part of the coat spread outward as if to make room for something to be tucked in at the sides. The hat was a tall stovepipe and had evidently seen better days. . . . It looked as if a calf might have gone over it with its wet tongue."

When he appeared on the platform or in the parlor he showed his respect for his audience or his associates by dressing properly and in a way that would have been wholly incompatible with the dust or mire of the prairie roads.

Lincoln's reputation as a lawyer was made between 1840 and 1854. From traveling the Eighth Circuit and the counties adjoining he extended his practice into every part of the state until, with the added fame which his debates with Douglas in 1858 brought him, there were many points in Illinois where in every important case it was considered necessary to engage the services of Mr. Lincoln. One cannot overestimate the value of this hard life on the circuit both as discipline developing the man's powers and as an avenue toward that extraordinary per-

sonal acquaintance which meant so much to him in his political struggles later on.

The Supreme Court was in session only a few days in the year, and the Circuit Court at Springfield sat for only a few weeks. The rest of the year he "rode the circuit" by stage and on horse-back until he could afford a buggy, visiting each of the fourteen county seats<sup>14</sup> regularly and extending his journey to almost as many adjoining towns. The courts in the circuit commenced in September and continued until midsummer, sitting in each of the fourteen towns from two days to a week.

The life on the circuit, hard as it was, with judge, lawyers, witnesses, hangers-on, and even prisoners, traveling and eating and sleeping together, the food unspeakable, and rest for nights unknown, must, nevertheless, have had its compensating joys. That was no ordinary company. Not unlike was it to the pilgrimage to Canterbury. There was David Davis, the companionable judge who knew the law and who loved a laugh. And there were Logan, the scholarly, and Stuart, the shrewd and kindly, Swett, the clever, and Browning, the handsome, and Lamon, the amusing, and Weldon and Gridley and Parks and Harmon and Ficklin and Linder and Whitney and Oliver L. Davis, and the best beloved Abraham Lincoln. Some of them traveled to only two or three counties, but David Davis and Lincoln went the whole circuit, Davis because he had to, and Lincoln because he loved it.

"I well recollect," says Henry C. Whitney,<sup>15</sup> "a term of court at Urbana, where a prisoner, who was on trial for perjury, used to spend the evenings with us in the judge's room; and of a term at Danville where the prisoner, on trial for larceny, not only spent his evenings in our room, but took walks with us and ate in our immediate company."

Leonard Swett says:

"I rode the Eighth Judicial Circuit with Lincoln for eleven years, and in the allotment between him and the large Judge

<sup>14</sup> These were Springfield, Pekin, Bloomington, Decatur, Taylorville, Mt. Pulaski, Metamora, Clinton, Monticello, Urbana, Danville, Shelbyville, Livingston and Paris.

<sup>15</sup> Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, p. 52.

Davis, in a scanty provision of these times, as a rule I slept with him. Beds were always too short, coffee in the morning burned or otherwise bad, food often indifferent, roads simply trails, streams without bridges and often swollen, and had to be swam, sloughs often muddy and almost impassable, and we had to help the horses when the wagon mired down with fence rails for pries."

Naturally, the business of a court that sat for only a few days and then adjourned for six months had to be crowded through in such a way as to afford scant opportunity for preparation. Thus the rule of the Macon Circuit Court (1840) reads: "All issues are required to be made up on call of the cause for trial."

And so Judge Davis had little patience with technicalities. "He kept the lawyers down to the merits," Whitney relates. "'It appears to me,' Swett once commenced, in an argument on demurrer. 'I don't care how it appears to you,' was the judge's tart response, 'Hand up your authorities if you have any.'"

The lawyers were wont to follow the court from county to county, often without employment except what they picked up on arrival. Sometimes the harvest of cases would not pay the cost of the journey, and again, after a lawyer's reputation as a case winner had become established, the business would be all that could be desired.

The trip to Tazewell County, seventy miles, as shown by the docket, cost \$21.25. To extend it to Decatur and Danville and Paris made the expense one which a less successful lawyer could not have afforded. The business that came to Lincoln on such a trip must sometimes have been disheartening. His first case at Decatur is *People vs. Adkin*, in which the defendant, charged with larceny, having pleaded his inability to employ counsel, Judge Treat appointed Lincoln to defend. The trial, with Lincoln's kinsman, Hanks, on the jury, resulted in an acquittal. The only case at one term at Danville was *Murphenheim vs. Scott* (1850), where the jury disagreed and the parties re-submitted the case and by agreement suffered a verdict to be entered of \$7.50, each party to pay half the costs—a commendable settlement no doubt, but a meager feast to set before a lawyer who had traveled over a hundred miles across the prairie.

At the fall term, 1852, at Danville, Lincoln's entire calendar consisted of three small cases, a criminal appeal from a justice of the peace, a verdict in his client's favor for one hundred dollars, and a judgment by default on a note. At Paris, in the adjoining county, the next week, his appearance is entered in nineteen cases, which, for a term of less than a week held one hundred and fifty miles from home, is no mean showing.

One feature of Judge Davis' itinerant court was his "night sessions." The lawyers attracted to the town by the advent of the court would find time hanging heavy on their hands, and, at the afternoon adjournment, would be notified to return after supper. This would bring together the best of the story-tellers and the most entertaining of the talkers. Sometimes, to keep up the form of court proceedings and thus justify the called session, a mock trial would be had which would give the lawyers who loved a practical joke an opportunity to get even with one another. It was one of these sessions, known as the "orgmatherial court," that Judge Oliver L. Davis tried Abraham Lincoln, on the criminal side of the court, for impoverishing the Bar and his own household by charging unreasonably low fees and by defending poor clients without pay. Lincoln was released on a suspended sentence, but with a severe reprimand.

"At these meetings," says "Uncle" Felix Ryan, of Lincoln, Illinois, "The lawyers would come to the court room and have fun together until the night was nearly gone. Many of the stories would be told by Mr. Lincoln. Judge Davis would sit there and pretend to read his docket until Lincoln would get him interested. I recall how Judge Davis' fat sides would shake with laughter as he said: 'Well, well, Mr. Lincoln, what next?'"

Squire J. T. Rudolph, of Lincoln, remembers when Judge Davis would call them all together as if to try cases, and the people of the town (Mt. Pulaski) would crowd in to enjoy an evening's entertainment as provided by the lawyers. Ward H. Lamon was a good singer, and would mount the big walnut table and sing and dance to the delight of every one.

When the night sessions were not held, the Bar would gather at the tavern, and, doubtless, to forget the misery of crowded beds and unspeakable meals, would keep the talk going all night long.

One of these taverns advertised, "Entertainment for Man and Beast," and like many of the rest discriminated in favor of the beast. Here decent and vulgar men mingled in admired confusion. Money was won and lost at cards and stories hopelessly coarse had no less currency than those did whose wit and humor have made them immortal. To the promiscuous character of these gatherings is due no doubt the fact that a half century later many stories are attributed to the civilized men of the company which never reached their ears.

It was during this period that an incident occurred of which Judge Blodgett, for many years United States Judge, is said to have told. It had rained for days, and when the company of circuit riders came to a swollen stream, which seemed to be miles wide, Lincoln was the only one who knew the country well enough to act as guide. He saw his opportunity and agreed to conduct the party across if they would do exactly as he bade them. The pledge was given and every lawyer was compelled to strip, tie his clothes in a bundle, and, mounting his horse, follow the leader. This grotesque, naked company, including the cherubic figure of David Davis, and the giant form of Abraham Lincoln, wound its way up and down the stream on horseback, until, much as Moses led the hosts of Israel through the Red Sea without wetting a garment, Lincoln conducted them to dry ground on the farther side of what they supposed was a flood, but which at no time rose higher than a horse's knees. One can imagine Lincoln's laugh at the threats of revenge which his associates uttered when they found what an absurd picture they had presented.

In many of these towns a few old men still live who tell with undiminished enthusiasm their recollections of that far-off time. Some of the communities are in few respects unlike what they were seventy years ago. Petersburg is still the home of the Rutledges, Greens, Clarys, and Armstrongs. And all over the circuit it is possible still to learn from men who knew Mr. Lincoln of incidents in his practice as yet unpublished.

"He was a very smart trial lawyer," Judge Lyman Lacey, of Havana, relates. "As he went along in easy fashion he admitted evidence offered by his opponents and conceded their points until it looked as if he had given his whole case away.

George W. Albion

In Standard.

Thomas Dodson

1<sup>st</sup> Albion stole Brady's horse out of my pasture last night - He is a horse thief, and that is what he came here for -

2<sup>nd</sup> Albion stole that horse last night out of my pasture, and he is a horse thief, and I knew that was his business here -

3<sup>rd</sup> He is a horse thief, and I always believed his business was horse stealing, and that is what brought him here -

4<sup>th</sup> Albion stole Brady's horse out of my pasture last night, and it is not the first horse he has stolen - He is a horse thief and follows that business -

5<sup>th</sup> You stole that horse out of my pasture, and it is not the first one you have stolen -

6<sup>th</sup> You <sup>know you</sup> stole that horse, and it is not the first horse you have stolen, and I believe you follow the business -

7<sup>th</sup> You are a horse thief and you came here for that business - and I believe you came here for nothing else - You are a horse thief -

8<sup>th</sup> He is a damned little thief, his business is horse stealing, and I can prove it -



9<sup>th</sup> He is a damian little horse  
thief, and his business is horse stealing, and he  
came here for that business, and that is not the  
first horse he has stolen - He is a horse thief, and  
I will send him to the penitentiary -

10<sup>th</sup> Albin is a horse thief, and  
he stole that horse out of my pasture, and I can  
prove it -

Albin }  
Bodine } Proof -



‘I don’t contest this point,’ Lincoln would say. ‘O! I’ll freely admit that.’ But all the time there would be one or more strong lines of defense left, and, after waiving aside all that he had yielded, he would conclude: ‘But here, gentlemen, is the real point in this case and on it we rest our defense.’”

Judge Samuel C. Parks, has noted this characteristic. He says:

“In a closely contested case in which he was assisting me, in his closing speech, he was extremely liberal in his admissions in favor of the defendant. We got a verdict for about two-thirds of our claim. I said to him: ‘Lincoln, you admitted too much.’ ‘No,’ he answered. ‘That’s what gained the case.’”

It is not easy to take a series of pleadings and the skeleton of an argument as we find them sixty years after and get from them any picture of the comedy or tragedy which was enacted when such a case was tried. Much must be left to the imagination if the picture is to be drawn. But even to the imagination sometimes these old records suggest what may have happened. There is a case on the docket of Edgar County for 1850 entitled *Albin vs. Bodine*, for slander. The record entries are: “Lincoln and Linder for defendant. Trial by jury. Verdict for defendant.” But in the files is a faded sheet of legal cap in Lincoln’s hand, entitled “Brief” which sets out the synopsis of points for the argument to the jury. And every point seems to be for the other side. This brief is a rare document, for its author had a tenacious memory and seldom used any notes. Let us read some of these points.

“1st. Albin stole Blady’s horse out of my pasture last night. He is a horse thief and that is what he came here for.

“8th. You know you stole that horse and it is not the first horse you have stole; and I believe you follow the business.

“9th. He is a damned little horse thief and his business is horse stealing, and he came here for that business and that is not the first horse he has stolen. He is a horse thief and I will send him to the penitentiary.

“*James Murphy.* Dr. Albin stole the priest’s horse out of my pasture.

“*Crimen falsi.*”

One theory of the defense is that the defendant said all that

he is charged with saying—"damned horse thief" and all—and that his counsel in one of his scathing philippics held the plaintiff up to deserved contempt, or by a series of brilliant sallies of wit laughed the plaintiff out of court. The other is suggested by the two Latin words *Crimen falsi* at the end and hints at an argument charging perjury. And yet all that the record shows is the use of language of the most slanderous sort and a verdict for the defense.

"I have sat on the jury in his cases," says Mr. Ryan. "He knew nearly every juror, and when he made his speech he talked to the jurors, one at a time, like an old friend who wanted to reason it out with them and make it as easy as possible for them to find the truth."

"He never talked long," says Mr. John Strong, of Atlanta, Illinois. "In stating a disputed proposition he would say, not 'This is the way it is,' but 'This is the way it seems to me,' thus allowing for an honest difference of opinion."

Judge S. A. Foley, of Lincoln, Illinois, has a clear memory of his court-room manner:

"When Lincoln examined a witness or addressed a jury, he had a peculiarly winning way of doing it. In an opening statement he seemed to take everybody into his confidence as though he proposed to keep nothing from them. In cross-examination he would first secure the witness' good will and then lead him gently along until he elicited from him the truth for which he was seeking. When he came to the argument he had something to say to each juror, and he led each one to believe that, as attorney, his only duty was to help the jury find the truth. Sometimes he made his point so plain with a story that there was no escaping his conclusion."

Because he reasoned his cases out it is not to be supposed that he lacked the graces of oratory. With the little audience in the jury box he began by feeling his way, studying the man addressed, and talking rather than speaking, until he felt sure that he was in complete accord with the men to whose judgment he was making his appeal. He was, first of all, a reasoner. But he was, too, a man of wide sympathy and deep feeling, and, once aroused, he was brilliant in ridicule, savage in assault, overwhelming in his emotional attack. It was the oratory of the forum, not the oratory of the platform or the stage.

Judge S. C. Parks, who had a large practice while Lincoln was riding the circuit and who is still living at Kansas City, said:<sup>16</sup>

"He was a great advocate and more successful at the Bar than many men who knew more law than himself. . . . For this there were two reasons. One was that he was naturally fair minded, and, as a rule, would not advocate any cause which he did not believe to be just. Owing to this characteristic he would not knowingly take a case that was wrong, and if he ignorantly got into such a case he would generally refuse to prosecute or defend it after he had ascertained his mistake. He was intellectually honest. He would not advocate a cause in which he did not believe. He was the easiest lawyer to beat when he thought he was wrong that I ever knew. . . . Soon after beginning to practice, I was employed to defend a man charged with larceny and Mr. Lincoln was employed to assist me. I really believed at the beginning of the trial that the man was not guilty. But the evidence was unfavorable, and at its close Mr. Lincoln called me into the consultation room and said: 'If you can say anything that will do our man any good, say it. I can't. If I say anything the jury will see that I think he is guilty and will convict him.' And so I proposed to the prosecutor to submit the case without argument. This was done. The jury disagreed, and before the case could be tried again the man died.

"In the same county Lincoln brought suit on an account and proved it without any trouble. Defendant's attorney then produced a receipt in full from the plaintiff which clearly covered the account. Lincoln took the receipt, examined it till he was satisfied, and handed it back to the opposing attorney who proceeded to prove it; whereupon the presiding judge (Treat) inquired: 'What do you say to that, Mr. Lincoln?' But Lincoln had quietly left the court house and gone to his hotel. The court sent for him, but he declined to return, saying to the sheriff: 'Tell Judge Treat that my hands are dirty and I want to wash them.' Owing to this habit of not advocating a bad case he had the advantage of feeling that he ought to gain the cases that he did advocate. He also had the advantage of having the confidence of the court and jury at the outset and the fairness and skill to keep it to the close."

The leader of this itinerant bar, without whose presence no gathering of men was complete, was not always to be found. He

<sup>16</sup> In a lecture before the University of Michigan.

had a way of going off after the companionship of children. One of these old-time little boys now describes the serious way in which Mr. Lincoln would call for their opinion on political questions, and interrogate them regarding their personal hopes and ambitions, and advise with them as if he considered them to be men of mature judgment. He was particularly given to trying to find what impression the young fellows had of his arguments and those of Douglas, seemingly bearing in mind the ideal of his own youth that he must make his meaning so plain that any boy he knew could comprehend. Another of these boys tells of the delicious way in which he talked foolishness to them as he joined in their games of marbles or hand ball.

Mr. George S. Cole, of Danville, now eighty years old, describes his first game of billiards over seventy years ago. "Mr. Lincoln called me in to see the first billiard table, and said, 'Come on, Bub, let's play a game.' My awkwardness with the cue seemed to please him hugely."

"Nothing tickled him so much," says Uncle Felix Ryan, "as to get a prank on the boys. Once they stretched a rope across the walk, just high enough to catch his plug hat. He pretended to be very angry and ran all over the place until he had caught the boys, making them think he was going to punish them, and then took them into the store and stood treat."

Sometimes the semi-annual session of court was the occasion of social activity of a more formal character. A reception or ball would draw the gentlemen of the Bar away from court room and tavern and into real society. There are ladies still living, who, although young in spirit, are old enough to recall those old times. They remember that Mr. Lincoln, who seemed to care so little for his appearance in the street and in court, was yet in society "a gentleman of the old school," who arose at once when a lady entered the room, and whose courtly manners would put to shame the easy-going indifference to etiquette which marks the twentieth century gentleman. One of them who must have been a belle in "the Fifties," loves to tell how many a pretty girl would lead her escort from the dance to the card-room because she wanted to listen to Mr. Lincoln's talk.

Says Mr. Arnold: "

"I must not omit to mention the old-fashioned, generous hospitality of Springfield—hospitality, proverbial to this day throughout the state. Among others, I recall the dinners and evening parties given by Mrs. Lincoln. In her modest and simple home, there was always, on the part of both host and hostess, a cordial and hearty western welcome, which put every guest perfectly at ease. Mrs. Lincoln's table was famed for the excellence of many rare Kentucky dishes, and in season, it was loaded with venison, wild turkeys, prairie chickens, quail, and other game which was then abundant. Yet it was her genial manners and ever kind welcome, and Mr. Lincoln's wit and humor, anecdote and unrivaled conversation, which formed the chief attraction."

The court room was not the only place where the lawyers made themselves useful. At Decatur, when the first piano was brought by wagon across the prairie, the adjournment of court, so Mrs. Jane Johns relates, furnished an anxious young lady with ample skilled labor to unload the big, delicate instrument. It was Mr. Lincoln who superintended the removal and his strong arms that lifted one end of the piano while a half dozen other brawny circuit riders handled the other end.

That was no day for specialists. The collection lawyer of seventy years ago won insubstantial rewards, although he did not hesitate to advertise for business. Even David Davis, soon to enter upon a long and brilliant judicial career, advertised in 1837 in the *Sangamo Journal*: "Notes and accounts entrusted to him for collection will meet with a most prompt attention." And Lincoln, in collecting six hundred dollars from Stephen A. Douglas under circumstances embarrassing to both, set the "minimum fee" precedent by charging three dollars and a half for the service.

There are in circulation many authentic stories that were used by Lincoln to enforce an argument at law. But they have all been published long ago, along with many that are not authentic. Two of these are no doubt familiar, but they will serve to show Lincoln's method. They are reported by Miss Tarbell in her "*Life of Lincoln*," and by Mr. Hill in his "*Lincoln the Lawyer*."

<sup>17</sup> Isaac N. Arnold, *Reminiscences of the Illinois Bar Forty Years Ago*, in *Fergus Historical Series*.

One of these is told by the late Judge Beckwith of Danville. Lincoln was trying to make plain to the jury the legal effect of self-defense. "My client," he explained, "was in the fix of a man who was carrying a pitchfork along the country road when he was suddenly attacked by a vicious dog. In the trouble that followed the prongs of the pitchfork killed the dog. 'What made you kill my dog?' the farmer cried in rage. 'What made him try to bite me?' 'But why didn't you go at him with the other end of the pitchfork?' 'Why didn't he come at me with the other end of the dog?' The jury saw what self-defense meant.

Mr. T. W. S. Kidd, for many years court crier at Springfield, says he once heard a lawyer arguing to the jury the controlling authority of precedent. When Lincoln's turn came to answer he took up the argument from precedent in this way: "Old Squire Bagley from Menard came into my office once and said: 'Lincoln, I want your advice as a lawyer. Has a man that's been elected a justice of the peace a right to issue a marriage license?' I told him No, and he threw himself back indignantly in his chair and said, 'Lincoln, I thought you was a lawyer. Bob Thomas and I had a bet on this thing, and we agreed to leave it to you, but if this is your opinion I don't want it, for I know a thunderin' sight better. I've been a Squire now eight years and I have done it all the time.'"

He once characterized an ultra-technical judge by saying "He would hang a man for blowing his nose in the street, but he would quash the indictment if it failed to state which hand he did it with."

The value he put upon simplicity is summed up in the remark he made to Herndon: "If I can clear this case of its technicalities and get it properly swung to the jury, I'll win it." From this it is by no means to be inferred that he did not respect the requirements of the practice, or make use of the technical points in a case where occasion required it. He was a practical, well-trained lawyer, who accepted all proper employments and gave to his clients the benefit of his extraordinary mental and legal equipment. In his early struggles in justice's courts his discomfited

To the Honorable the Judge of the Sangamon  
Circuit Court in Chancery sitting.

Humbly complai-  
ing, sheweth unto your Honor, your oration, Mary Shelby  
by that on the                      day of                      in the year  
1827 in the County of Sangamon, she was lawfully  
married to one Mack Shelby (a gentleman of  
color); that they continued to live together (though  
not in the highest state of conjugal felicity) till be-  
tween one and two years since; that they have  
not lived together since that time; that during  
the whole, or the greater part of the time which they  
cohabited, the said Mack was a habitual drunk-  
ard, providing nothing for your oration or other mem-  
bers of the family, so that the maintenance of the  
said Mack, of her children, and of herself, wholly  
devolved upon your oration—

In consideration of which, your ora-  
tion prays that the People's writ of Subpoena may  
issue for the said Mack Shelby, in law she prays  
may be made defendant herein, and that he  
be required to answer to. And that on a full  
and hearing of the cause, your Honor will decree  
that the bonds of matrimony heretofore and now  
existing between your oration and the said defend-  
ant be forever dissolved, and as in duty bound to.

Lincoln for  
Compliment.



opponents used to hint at pettifogging, and in his Supreme Court arguments he was willing to win on questions of practice and what careless lawyers and ignorant laymen call technicalities. Lawyers know that a neglect to take such advantage as the rules of the practice permit is a breach of the duty one owes to a client. And they know, too, that one who "plays the game" according to its rules may yet play fairly and honestly.

The traditions of Lincoln's humor in the trial of his cases are well established. In his early practice particularly he used his gifts as a raconteur and a mimic most effectively in demonstrating his points. The evidence of this is in the reminiscences of his colleagues and in oral tradition. Old men of middle Illinois still repeat his stories. The actual court record of his humor is very slight. I only know of two illustrations. One is a figure probably employed by him in presenting a point of law to the Supreme Court in St. Louis, etc., *Railway Company against Dalby*, 19 Ill. 353, and is buried in the mass of a profound opinion by Judge Caton at page 374. The other is a bill for divorce, the original of which is in the possession of Mr. F. R. Fisher of Terre Haute, Indiana. At that time no one had any good will for the negro. The bill is drawn in a jocular vein, referring to the defendant, who was a habitual drunkard, as "a gentleman of colour," and averring that the couple had lived together for many years, "though not in the highest state of connubial felicity."

Judge Gustave Koerner, who served on the Supreme Bench in the early period of Lincoln's practice, recalls in his *Memoirs*, published last year, "the often quaint and droll language used by him" in his arguments in that court.

That he had the Bible at his tongue's end, and, knowing its value in any appeal he might make to the sympathy, or imagination, or reason of his audience, made use of it in his public utterances, is well known. That he made the same use of Scripture in convincing his juries is a matter of tradition. To get the documentary proof of this has not been so easy. But in the files of the Circuit Court of Menard County the papers in *Page vs. Boyd*,

tried in 1847, afford the proof that his use of the Bible in his closing speech was causing his opponent some uneasiness. It was a damage suit against Lincoln's client for injuries suffered by two mares that had strayed into the defendant's pasture and been used by defendant while in his custody. In the files, hurriedly scrawled on a scrap of paper by plaintiff's counsel, Mr. Robbins, is the following:

"Will the court instruct the jury that the passage from Exodus,<sup>18</sup> read by the counsel in this case, does not apply in this suit as law?"

This instruction is endorsed "Given." The record shows a verdict for plaintiff.

Any lawyer of Lincoln's ability would have accumulated a comfortable fortune with such a practice. When he left Springfield in 1861 he was fifty-two years old and the recognized leader of the Illinois Bar. And yet, though living far from extravagantly, his entire estate was barely ten thousand dollars.

Mr. John W. Bunn, of Springfield, a client and friend, tells an incident which fairly illustrates Lincoln's idea of the value of his own services. George Smith and Company, Chicago bankers, had written to Mr. Bunn to get some one to look after their defense in an attachment suit involving several thousand dollars. Lincoln conducted the trial and, winning it, charged them twenty-five dollars. They wrote back to Mr. Bunn: "We asked you to get the best lawyer in Springfield and it certainly looks as if you had secured one of the cheapest."

For defending a damage suit at Paris involving three thousand dollars, Mr. Andrew J. Hunter says the fee charged Mr. Hunter's father by Usher F. Linder and Abraham Lincoln was fifteen dollars, paid in wild-cat currency.

The instances of his volunteer service, as in defending "Duff" Armstrong for murder, for friendship's sake, are not rare. When he had finished a case he seemed indifferent to any desire for

<sup>18</sup> The passage referred to may have been Exodus XXII-10-11; XXIII-4.

adequate compensation. The joy of the contest had been his, and the satisfaction of having done his best. As for the fees, they were of little consequence.

His charge in the defense of McCormick *vs.* Manny, a case involving some of the McCormick reaper patents, valued at half a million dollars, was two thousand dollars, and his fee in the case of McLean County against Illinois Central Railroad Company was five thousand dollars. His average yearly income when he left the practice is said to have been about three thousand dollars.

When he had finished his senatorial race against Stephen A. Douglas and paid his campaign assessment of five hundred dollars, he returned to take up the practice, which had become sadly demoralized. "It is bad to be poor," he wrote in 1859, "I shall go to the wall for bread and meat if I neglect my business this year as well as last." To eke out his income he prepared a lecture which he delivered at a few places. But as a lyceum speaker he was as free from mercenary influences as he was at the law. Mr. Robert D. McDonald, of Danville, tells how the young men of Pontiac engaged him to lecture at the Presbyterian Church without agreeing on terms in advance. "When I came to settle with the speaker out of the receipts from a full house, Mr. Lincoln took the first ten-dollar bill I handed him and threw up his hands as he protested, 'For Heaven's sake don't give me any more; ten dollars is all it is worth.'"

Mr. James S. Ewing commenced the practice of law at about the time of Lincoln's election to the Presidency and is now in the practice at Bloomington. Probably no one now living is better qualified from personal knowledge and understanding to speak of Lincoln, the lawyer. He said:<sup>19</sup>

"When I first knew anything of courts, Hon. Samuel H. Treat was the presiding judge of this circuit. He was appointed to the federal Bench and the Hon. David Davis became his suc-

<sup>19</sup> Address at Bloomington, Feb. 12, 1909.

cessor and continued as the circuit judge until appointed by Mr. Lincoln as an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. It was then the habit for such lawyers as possessed sufficient experience and ability to attract a clientage to follow the court around the circuit. Mr. Lincoln was of this number, and, more, perhaps, than any other, was most constant and unremitting in his attendance.

"During these fifteen years I heard Mr. Lincoln try a great many lawsuits. Lincoln was a master in all that went to make up what was called a jury lawyer. His wonderful power of clear and logical statement seemed the beginning and end of the case. After his statement of the law and the facts we wondered either how the plaintiff came to bring such a suit, or how the defendant could be such a fool as to defend it. By the time the jury was selected, each member of it felt that the great lawyer was his friend and was relying on him as a juror to see that no injustice was done. Mr. Lincoln's ready, homely, but always pertinent, illustrations, incidents and anecdotes, could not be resisted.

"Few men ever lived who knew, as he did, the mainsprings of action, secret motives, the passions, prejudices, and inclinations which inspired the actions of men, and he played on the human heart as a master on an instrument. This power over a jury was, however, the least of his claims to be entitled a good lawyer. He was masterful in a legal argument before the court. His knowledge of the general principles of the law was extensive and accurate, and his mind so clear and logical that he seldom made a mistake in their application."

The best of Lincoln's earlier biographers was Isaac N. Arnold, a lawyer of no mean ability, and a member of Congress from Illinois during the Civil War and afterwards. This is his estimate:

"Lincoln was, upon the whole, the strongest jury lawyer in the state. He had the ability to perceive with almost intuitive quickness the decisive point in the case. In the examination and cross-examination of a witness he had no equal. He could compel a witness to tell the truth when he meant to lie, and if a witness lied he rarely escaped exposure under Lincoln's cross-examination. His legal arguments . . . were always clear, vigorous and logical, seeking to convince rather by the application of principle than by the citation of cases. A stranger going into court when he was trying a case would, after a few moments, find himself on Lincoln's side and wishing him success.

He seemed to magnetize every one. He was so straightforward, so direct, so candid, that every spectator was impressed with the idea that he was seeking only truth and justice. He excelled in the statement of his case. However complicated, he would disentangle it and present the real issue in so simple and clear a way that all could understand. Indeed, his statement often rendered argument unnecessary, and frequently the court would stop him and say: 'If that is the case, brother Lincoln, we will hear the other side.'"<sup>20</sup>

No one knew Lincoln the lawyer better than David Davis. He said:

"I enjoyed for over twenty years the personal friendship of Mr. Lincoln. We were admitted to the Bar about the same time and traveled for many years what is known in Illinois as the Eighth Judicial Circuit. In 1848, when I first went on the Bench, the circuit embraced fourteen counties, and Mr. Lincoln went with the court to every county. Railroads were not then in use, and our mode of travel was either on horseback or in buggies. . . . In all the elements that constitute a great lawyer, Mr. Lincoln had few equals. He was great both at *nisi prius* and before an appellate tribunal. He seized the strong points of a cause and presented them with clearness and great compactness. His mind was logical and direct, and he did not indulge in extraneous discussion. His power of comparison was large and he rarely failed in a legal discussion to use that mode of reasoning. The framework of his mental and moral being was honesty, and a wrong cause was poorly defended by him. In order to bring into full activity his great powers, it was necessary that he should be convinced of the right and justice of the matter which he advocated. When so convinced whether the cause was great or small, he was usually successful. He hated wrong and oppression everywhere, and many a man whose fraudulent conduct was undergoing review in a court of justice has writhed under his terrible indignation and rebuke."

In the Douglas debates, in his first inaugural address, and in the emergencies of the Civil War, of which the Mason and Slidell incident is a type, when he had to overrule his advisers and render his own final judgment, and in every significant utterance as President, are to be found the proof of the trained lawyer. With politics and history this paper has nothing to do. It is the coun-

<sup>1</sup> Isaac N. Arnold, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 84.

try lawyer whose career we have been studying. To the questions, Who taught the author of the Gettysburg oration and the Second Inaugural, and Whence came that simplicity of style? we have sought our answer in the story of his career at the law, of how he began, as a boy, with the determination to make his thought plain, of the influence of his public-spirited teachers, the opportunities he had in the Black Hawk War and in the legislature to know the men who were to control public opinion in the new state, the value of a giant physical strength which enabled him to endure the hardships of the life on the circuit and thrive upon them, and how, in all these experiences, two ambitions controlled him—to master the study of human nature, and to express his thought in language “plain enough for any boy he knew to comprehend.”

Men of America have erected a shrine for Abraham Lincoln. Some love to recall him as he appealed to his “dissatisfied fellow countrymen” in 1861; others, as he dedicated the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. To others he is to be remembered as the great emancipator. The boys who wore the blue and who are now wearing the grey of God’s providing, think of him as the “Father Abraham” of the armies of the union. To others there comes the picture of a man of sorrows whose life at Washington was one long heart-break, and whose only cheer came when he could pardon a soldier boy.

It is no less a man whose picture we see today—in fancy or in memory—the simple-minded country lawyer, who loved the children, and who understood human nature as he studied it in the uncouth countrymen of a prairie frontier. As he stood outside the courthouse, long after court had adjourned, explaining things to his neighbors and friends who gathered to hear his talk, we can see his giant figure with its earnest kindly face traced in the twilight of an autumn evening against the rude brick walls—the figure of Lincoln, the country lawyer, trusted and loved by all who knew him.

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